

## **URBANIZATION AND CONTEMPORARIES TRANSFORMATIONS: REFLECTIONS FROM JUAZEIRO NORTE / CE**

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In the present article, I will try to present some reflections on the relations between urbanization, consumption and socio-spatial fragmentation as defining a new moment in Brazilian urban history. I will take as an empirical example the city of Juazeiro do Norte, in the south of Ceará, for particular reasons: first, because it was one of the cities I studied in the last decade, both in masters and doctorates; and second, because I

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still have the same position (which was expressed during the development of my master's research) that more research focusing on urbanization and city production needs to be developed to understand Juazeiro do Norte in the current historical-geographical context.

On this occasion, I will recover some ideas that I developed during my doctoral thesis, which investigated the new urban condition related to the new spaces of commerce and consumption in Brazil. Thus, some ideas written here are somehow distributed and scattered in other materials that have been produced and published in the last four years at various scientific events.

Initially, I take as a starting point the idea that in recent decades, the dynamics of Brazilian urbanization and its particularity in the whole-world characterize a new historical period. This new period, conceptualized by many authors in different ways, has as its main characteristics global commodity flows, financial deregulation, and the accumulation of capital in

the sphere of finance as defining a new “spatial power geometry” that differentiates, hierarchizes and redefines places (SWYNGEDOUW, 1999), articulated with the revolutions of information and technology, which produced what Santos (1996) called the “technical-scientific-informational medium”.

In this sense, the production of space, as a social process, has gained new content under the capitalist mode of production. In this contemporary moment, I rely on the reflections of the French geographer Michel Lussault (2007, p. 9), for whom “all the symptoms of the constitution of the contemporary world are spatial”. He states that

[...] the characteristics of the globalized society that is built under our eyes are eminently spatial; mobility, telecommunication inflation, changes in neighboring regimes, co-spatiality, constitution of polytopic habitats (ie increasing numbers of people permanently inhabiting various places), widespread urbanization, the emergence of large space switches such as airports, functional specialization of space around some big figures such as leisure parks, the shopping center, the growing social segregation (LUSSAULT, 2007, p. 9).

In the same vein, we agree with Brenner (2013, p. 43), when he stated that “urban spaces have become essential for political, economic, social and cultural life, as well as for the world's social and environmental conditions”. This means that contemporary urbanization embraces and connects change at multiple geographic scales in a process that redefines our own daily life and our relationships with the city. The role of consumption in contemporary capitalism, as has been demonstrated by several authors (FONTENELLE, 2014), is a central aspect.

I think this relationship between geographic scales is essential to understanding the world in which we live. It can be translated as a methodological conception that is related to the suggestion of Silveira (2015) about the study of the urban phenomenon. For the author, three perspectives make it possible to understand the urban phenomenon of the contemporary world: the first, the studied period of cities and urbanization

allows revealing the forms and contents of modernization and the territorial division of labor; the second, cities and agglomerations are changing, that is, they are changing, in which functions and hierarchies are changing; and the third, finally, it is necessary to search and analyze the cities themselves, because they are the urban manifestations - even if not only them - that incorporate the data of a certain time, differentiating themselves and presenting new forms and functions.

Juazeiro do Norte is a city known for its religious phenomenon, for the figure of Father Cicero. For a long time, studies that sought to understand the city, linked - legitimately, it is important to emphasize - the role played by Father Cicero and other social agents that since the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, produced the city. This “city of faith” feature, which attracts thousands of pilgrims a year, has not disappeared. It fuses and articulates with the emergence of what we call a “capital city”, which began to take shape and emerge in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is not a question of dualism

or dichotomy, but of complexity, transformation and restructuring. In our view, this characteristic of the reproduction space of capitalism is today something that needs to be further researched, given the need to understand the production of urban space as embedded in global logics of “geographically unequal developments”, according to Harvey (2015). and Smith (1988) conceptualized.

This more complex city that has taken shape and content with the insertion of the logic of neoliberal globalization of the end of the last century expresses itself in the urban landscape in a very clear way. The large companies that regulate the territory, which use it in a capitalist way, transformed the city of Juazeiro do Norte into a “profitable space”. I am inspired here by Milton Santos (1996), when he suggests which places are chosen by companies for their operations as they offer profitability for investments in the territory. Understanding Juazeiro do Norte as a profitable city is, in other words, to perceive it as a socially produced space under the logic of capitalist accumulation and, as

such, selects places that are potentially capable of generating profits and incomes for companies. This selection of places has to do with the labor market, the weight of the economic sectors in the urban economy, and the population that will be affected by the investments, including those aimed at consumption.

In this case, when talking about Juazeiro do Norte, it is always important to keep in mind that it is part of an urban settlement with Crato and Barbalha, which together have almost half a million inhabitants, thus constituting an important space for the production and generation of wealth and economic dynamism in the interior not only of Ceará, but of the Brazilian Northeast and of significant regional influence. This fact influenced the creation of the Cariri Metropolitan Region in 2009, composed of nine municipalities with more than 600 thousand inhabitants.

This conjuncture and the spatial interactions between cities over time made it possible for Juazeiro do Norte to become the selective space where the main capitalist investments in the

region are made. Large commercial enterprises such as shopping malls, hypermarkets and supermarkets, together with the presence of new urban habitats for the wealthier social classes, make up the urban landscape together with the spaces of poverty and misery, with housing programs that reinforce the processes of socio-spatial segregation. urban

From our research, we can cite some considerations that seem to be important, and indicate some paths for possible studies that, in my view, deserve attention from those who are interested in life in the city, its history, its geography (which when Contrary to what has been said, it is of little importance to understand the city of Juazeiro do Norte) and, above all, its future.

A first consideration refers to urban structuring. The transformation of the city in recent decades is something that draws attention to anyone who visits it. Verticalization, new consumption spaces, new articulations that have changed and made the urban economy more complex undoubtedly constitute

a new space in the urban history of the city. This new space, which is not displaced by the dynamics of the economy and politics on a national and international scale, is expressed in a redefinition of the urban structure and the new content-forms of the city's geographical space. We would say, following Milton Santos (1994, p. 31) that Juazeiro do Norte, as a place, is a world, and “all places are worldly [because] the people and places are globalizing”. The center and the periphery, in this context of economic and neoliberal globalization, are no longer the same. Today we can already see the existence of a more complex urban structure, with distinct centrality areas and functioning according to a more dynamic city production logic and with diversified land uses that make up a social division of space that has reverberation in spatial practices. of the city and the uses of urban space by individuals, families and social classes. This leads me to consider a hypothesis that seems reasonable to me, but that deserves to be investigated, which concerns the restructuring of the urban space of Juazeiro do Norte and the

uses of space by pilgrims. Taking into account that the “city of capital” neither nullifies nor eliminates the “city of Father Cicero”, it is necessary to understand the production of space based on the religious movement and its relations with the process of socioeconomic modernization that globalization entails.

In this regard, I think that with regard to urban centrality and the redefinitions of the contents of the peripheries, it seems plausible to me that for the pilgrims the urban structure that is used is quite confined to symbolic spaces from which religion is taken as the primordial and representative aspect. Thus, the consumption spaces of these groups (mainly devotees) are restricted to the city center and the pericentral area, where churches and monuments are located, while the areas of centrality more linked to the determinations of capital and of little or no religious representation. , such as Cariri Garden Shopping, the “gastronomic center” in the Lagoa Seca neighborhood and even the Pirajá subcentre, are not used by

these groups. Here, poverty and income may be essential elements in understanding the uses of the urban space of Juazeiro do Norte according to social classes and the symbolic and power meanings.

A second is the articulation between segregation and housing. There is a vacuum here in relation to Juazeiro do Norte. Little research has been done on this topic, and it is urgent that researchers turn their eyes to the theme of space production, the right to the city and the issue of housing in the city. The dynamics of the housing market and the impacts of the housing programs of the National Bank of Housing (BNH) on Minha Casa, Minha Vida, are still poorly known and deserve closer analysis. However, it was possible to observe in our research that residential spaces were profoundly transformed in the city in question. Not only housing from housing programs, but also new ways of living surrounded by walls and all sorts of what Michel Lussault (2007) called "space security devices" following a logic of insecurity and fear are already noticeable. Thus, the city d

overlaps the dynamic neighborhood life, still existing, especially in the neighborhoods of the poor peripheries, with the city in which segregation and fragmentation present themselves as contemporary processes that redefine the space and social life in the city.

A third consideration refers to consumption and debt-related socio-spatial fragmentation as characteristics of a new urban condition. Contemporary transformations have produced a new poverty that has redefined the lives of Juazeiro do Norte city dwellers and thousands of people in Brazil. Credit and consumption possibilities allowed the poorer classes to rise economically in the wake of national economic growth and social policies to reduce poverty and reduce inequalities. However, along with consumption, there was an increase in debt that had impacts on ways of living in the city. Consumption via credit enabled forms of use of spaces that favored closed spaces of commerce and consumption, as well as access to new forms of housing. The city became more complex in an articulation of the

segregation process, with the poor still living far from the spaces of commerce and consumption (just look at the locations of the “Minha Casa, Minha Vida” groups in the city), with the fragmentation, in that consumption becomes the new mediator of socio-spatial relations, articulations and separations. This theme, which we discuss in our thesis, deserves more attention and more research needs to be done in the city of Juazeiro do Norte, considering now the new conjuncture of social, political and economic crisis and radicalization of neoliberalism and the rise of a “new ”Right. The implications of these changes in everyday life, in the uses of public spaces, and in social and individual reproduction are not small.

In order to think about the future, already concluding my reflections, it is important to seriously discuss the issue of “smart cities” and what it may entail for the structuring of urban space and social life in the city; in other words, in the social production of space. I highlight this theme because the city of Juazeiro do Norte is at the forefront in Brazilian cities with a project of

insertion in the group of smart cities around the planet. This policy has been supported by the local government, with much acclaim and media coverage. This debate is extremely important because it puts neoliberal urbanism at the center of the reflection. Neoliberal urbanism because it is the market that deals with the organization and structuring of the city and urban policy. The strategies seem to guide the city's production towards external companies, encouraging innovation and PPPs (Public-Private Partnerships; universities and companies, creating a favorable and attractive business environment, etc.). Already in the 1980s, David Harvey pointed out that “urban entrepreneurship” was already presenting itself as the new trend of capitalist urbanization processes in the first world, placing the market and economic agents as those capable of financing the city and, therefore, organize it and produce it. While inequality is expressed in the urban landscape and in the forms of living, consuming and working, in short, of living, it is concerned with building a marketing image to attract private investment in a



“war of places” context ( SANTOS, 1996) and attempts to solve the structural problems of the city's production with technologies, reaffirming and predicting technological determinism as the only alternative for the city's future. Is that so? We need to ask ourselves: who is it for and what is the meaning of these “smart cities”? The exchange value thus seems to overlap more and more with the use value. Reviving the use and value of use, following the trails of Lefebvre (2008), is a necessary condition for us to build a more socially fair and minimally democratic city, without falling into the mermaid's corner to easy solutions sold by the market.

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